



Water Quality NewsFlash

Published by California Department of Transportation, Division of Environmental Analysis, Office of Storm Water Policy

June 20, 2005

Number 05-25

Background Concentration of Regulated Pollutants - Soil concentration data available for California

– Some pollutants that are regulated by water quality objectives are naturally present in soils. They may also be part of the natural background in waterways in either dissolved or particulate form. Sometimes, these naturally occurring substances may constitute a significant portion of the “pollutant” load identified through sampling and analysis. This becomes an issue, for example, when Basin Plans borrow the drinking water Maximum Contaminate Levels (MCLs) which are applicable to tap water and apply them as the appropriate surface water standards for waterways designated as potential sources of drinking water. (The Central Valley Basin Plan only applies the MCLs to the dissolved metals (rather than “total” metals) which lessens the compliance problems.) The MCL for iron, a common soil constituent, is 0.3 mg/l. Iron, however, is very common and soils typically contain about 4% iron, although the concentrations vary widely.

Runoff from roadways typically contains 100 mg/l or more of suspended solids. This amount of suspended solids is the informal threshold for what is considered an allowable amount of sediment in a discharge. If this 100 mg/l of suspended solids consisted only of local soils blown onto the roadway, the resulting iron concentration would be around 4 mg/l. This would exceed the drinking water standard and could be considered a compliance problem even though the waterway could easily contain this amount of iron naturally. Other natural constituents of soils, which can cause apparent compliance problems in some situations, include aluminum, copper, and mercury. A useful compilation of natural constituents in soils is "*Background Concentrations of Trace and Major Elements in California Soils*" prepared by staff at UC Riverside: <http://www.envisci.ucr.edu/faculty/chang/kearney/kearneytext.html>.

Stormwater Plans – State to support public access – The State Water Resources Control Board has issued a policy letter to the Regional Boards instructing them to make Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plans (construction sites) and municipal Storm Water Management Plans readily available to the public. This is intended to increase public participation in the stormwater permitting process. http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/stormwtr/docs/swppp_public_review.pdf.

Brake Pad Partnership – Stakeholder Conference scheduled – The Partnership is investigating the possible impact of copper and other metals used in brakepads on water quality. The Partnership has released a series of reports over the last several months. They have completed the laboratory and environmental monitoring component of their work and are now turning to environmental modeling efforts. The reports and information on the June 22 Stakeholder Conference are available at <http://www.suscon.org/brakepad/index.asp>.

WQ NewsFlash is a weekly update of storm water and related news for the Department. *Verify information before taking action on these bulletins.* Contact Betty Sanchez, Betty_Sanchez@dot.ca.gov (916) 653-2115, or Fred Krieger, (510) 843-7889, fkrieger@msn.com with questions or to be added or deleted from e-mail list. Posted online at: <http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/env/stormwater/publicat/newsflash/index.htm>.